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ABSTRACT

In the report of her consultation visit to South Carolina, Dr. Marie Clay noted: "A school has reached full implementation when that school has sufficient hours of trained teacher time available to serve all the children defined by that school as needing Reading Recovery." This article explains how one teacher pursued local answers to the implementation of Reading Recovery, including a suggestion for reconfiguring classrooms to allow for additional teachers to be trained. The article takes the teacher through three years of classroom reading instruction and dealing with children with reading problems. Its aim is for teacher leaders around the country to use this information to develop their own methods for demonstrating the need for full implementation of Reading Recovery projects. Contains 4 tables and 7 references. (NKA)

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How Much Reading Recovery Do We Need?

by Jo Anne Noble

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CS 014 316

How Much Reading Recovery Do We Need?

Working Toward Full Implementation: Demonstrating Need and Considering Resources

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As administrators and teachers contemplate the introduction of Reading Recovery at the state, district, or school level, or as they evaluate current programs and consider expansion, they must ask pertinent questions: How many children are at risk of failing to learn to read in our system? How many teachers will we need to serve them all? How will we use our resources to accomplish this? What circumstances are necessary for the most effective implementation? In the report of her consultation visit to South Carolina, Dr. Marie Clay noted: "A school has reached full implementation when that school has sufficient hours of trained teacher time available to serve all the children defined by that school as needing the program." (p.7). This is generally referred to as 15-20% of the first grade cohort, but it varies with diverse school populations.

These questions were germane in my school where we seemed to be under-implemented; that is, not all of the children who needed access to Reading Recovery instruction were receiving it. In this article, I will explain how I pursued local answers to the questions above so the information could be used for expansion consideration, including a suggestion for reconfiguring classrooms to allow for additional teachers to be trained. It is my hope that teacher leaders around the country will use this information to develop their own methods for demonstrating the need for full implementation.

My school implemented Reading Recovery in 1991-1992 when I joined the staff as a teacher leader in my district. Working as a half-time Reading Recovery teacher serving two waves of children, I could serve only eight per year. Since there were approximately 150 first grade-children, I was able to provide instruction for only five to six percent of them. At this low level of implementation and with only one Reading Recovery teacher in the school, I had a number of concerns about the implementation:

- Because children in the lowest 5% of a class are likely to be the most difficult to teach and to need longer time in the program, the success rates for the school and the teacher will be negatively affected.
- The Reading Recovery teacher does not have the benefit of support from a colleague and easy access to feedback on his or her lessons.
- The classroom teachers do not feel the impact of the program when only one or two children in their rooms are served.
- Administrators and district level personnel are unaware of the potential impact of the program because of the low number of children being served.

And the most significant concern of all:

- Children are failing to learn to read and write while being deprived of services in an individual tutoring program with a remarkable record of success.

Dr. Clay cautioned state educators about some of these very same issues in her report : "During partial implementation a school thinks that the program will never serve its needs, and a district feels it will never deliver the program to all who need it". She charges those in Reading Recovery that:

> It is important to point to the clear cases of individual success - of individuals, of schools and of districts - without bemoaning the overall figures. Apparent low success of the program during partial implementation is due to the few children reached as the very lowest achievers who take more time to go through the program. As Reading Recovery is given to more children the ones entering with the higher scores take less time to go through the programme. The early days of partial implementation tend to throw up the most depressing results at the system level, and results look better as the implementation expands to meet the need. (p.7-8)

In the first two years of implementation in my school, when I served only five to six percent of the first grade population, the average number of weeks in the program for discontinued children was 22 weeks in 1991-92 and 18 weeks in 1992-93. While I was pleased with these individuals successes, as Dr. Clay had warned, I was discouraged by the low discontinuing rate. As expected, administrators were concerned about the numbers of children served and the discontinued rate, classroom teachers still had non-readers in their classrooms, and too many children were experiencing literacy failure.

An Opportunity to Demonstrate Need

In the third year, differing circumstances compelled us to consider how to meet the needs of the children and to investigate the true need in our school using our own children as examples for comparison. In that year, two first grade classes had a large number of children who scored below standard on the state readiness test. It was decided that I would serve children from only those two first grade classrooms, believing that there would be advantages to selecting four students from each of these two classrooms rather than one or two from eight separate ones. The first is that the classroom teacher would experience a greater impact on the achievement levels in her classroom because four of her lowest readers would receive individual help, rather than just one. The second advantage was that Reading Recovery students would provide reinforcement to each other. And finally, Reading Recovery would be serving 20% of the children in those classrooms rather then five percent of the entire first grade. This final point had the potential to increase the probability of success as Clay noted:

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"As resources are increased, more children can be taken into the program, but as those initially were the poorest performers and the hardest to teach, the job gets easier as the operation gets larger. It is easier to teach the next 5 percent in an expanding program than it was to teach the first five percent" (DeFord, 1991, p.61).

This situation provided an exceptional opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of Reading Recovery in our school. By providing information on the progress of similar children from another classroom, I could illustrate dramatically the levels of achievement of our own children who did and did not have the opportunity to participate in Reading Recovery instruction. A comparison group of eight children was selected from the pool of eligible children. The comparison group came from the two classrooms with the next highest number of children "below standard", four from each room. Although children from both groups had scores which would make them eligible for Reading Recovery services if those rooms were served, resources limited the number who could be served overall. The children in the comparison group received excellent classroom instruction, but no individual instructional intervention.

I administered the *Observation Survey* tasks to all 16 children in the fall. The results are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1

Fall Scores for Both Groups

	Reading Recovery Group Average Raw Score/Stanine*		Comparison Group Average Raw Score/Stanine*
	All Children	Discontinued	
	N = 8	N = 5	N=8
Letter Identification	37/2	43/2	29.4/1
Ohio Word Test	25/1	4/1	0/1
Concepts about Print	7.6/1	7.6/1	7.7/1
Writing Vocabulary	3.6/3	4.2/4	2.2/2
Hearing Sounds	4.5/1	4.8/1	2.4/1
Text Reading	75	1**	42**

*The U.S. stanines for the Observation Survey were determined through a study of children in the Early Literacy Project (Pinnell, McCarrier and Button, 1989-91).
The research group used to determine these stanines included first grade students enrolled in public schools in Columbus, Ohio.
**On Test 6, Text Reading, a score of 0 in autumn actually covered stanines 1 to 4 as a large percentage of students were unable to read. The test cannot differentiate levels of non-reading.

There were minor differences between the groups in the fall. The total Reading Recovery group was able to identify an average of eight more letters and could write an average of 1.4 more words at the beginning of the year, a difference of one stanine in each case. Retrospectively, I considered the differences between the children who eventually discontinued from the program with those who had only partial programs or who were referred. The discontinued group fell into a group one stanine higher on the Writing Vocabulary test when compared to the total Reading Recovery group, but two stanines higher than the comparison group on this measure where they could write two more words.

At the end of the year, five of the eight children served by Reading Recovery had successfully completed the program, having reached or exceeded the average level in their classrooms and shown signs of being independent learners. This had been achieved in an average of 14 weeks in the program. Three of the children had not discontinued. Two of those had entered the program after the midpoint in the school year and had not received full programs. One child was referred out of the program at mid-year when it was determined she would need a longer-term or different intervention. For this analysis, I averaged scores for all eight of the children who received Reading Recovery instruction, regardless of whether they had full programs or were successfully discontinued.

Both groups were retested at the end of the year. (One child from the Comparison Group had moved to another school, leaving only 7 in that group.) The end of the year *Observation Survey* results are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2

End of Year Date for Both Groups

	Reading Recovery Group Average Raw Score/Stanine*		Comparison Group Average Raw Score/Stanine*
	All Children	Discontinued	
	N = 8	N = 5	N=7
Letter Identification	52/4	52.4/4	48/2
Ohio Word Test	16/5	18.8/6	10.4/3
Concepts about Print	16.7/5	18.8/6	15/3
Writing Vocabulary	52/7	57.8/8	33/5
Hearing Sounds	32/4	35.4/6	26.5/3
Text Reading	13.5/6	18.8/7	5.5/3

Generally stanines 1, 2, and 3 reflect below average performance, stanines 4, 5, and 6 average performance, and stanines 7, 8, and 9 above average performance. In the fall, both groups were operating in below average ranges. By year end, the total Reading Recovery group had achieved text reading levels that were three stanines higher than the comparison group and the discontinued group had scored at levels four stanines higher. Because this is a record of performance in reading books, the difference is especially significant. There was a measurable difference of two stanines between the total groups on the Letter Identification task, the Ohio Word Test, the Concepts About Print Test, and Writing Vocabulary task. The Reading Recovery group achieved levels one stanine higher on the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words task. The discontinued group scored at levels three stanines higher than the comparison group on The Ohio Word Test, Concepts About Print Test, Writing Vocabulary, and Hearing Sounds in Words Tests. The Reading Recovery group's results reflected average or above average achievement in all areas, while the

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comparison group's results fell in the below average range in all areas except Writing Vocabulary.

All of these children were given follow-up text reading measures in the spring of their second grade year. The five children who had discontinued from Reading Recovery were reading on average at text level 26, which is equivalent to a 4th grade basal reader; as a group, the eight children who had received Reading Recovery instruction were reading at text level 20, equivalent to grade 2; and the six comparison children who were available were reading at text level 15, which is equivalent to a grade 1 basal reader.

Did those children in the comparison group need Reading Recovery? Were more Reading Recovery teachers needed to serve their needs? Of course the answers are obvious. These results were expected. This was by no means a scientific experiment in the sense that I did not use acceptable experimental procedures such as random placements of children in treatment and control groups, nor did I conduct statistical analyses on the data. It was simply a way for me to underscore the effectiveness of Reading Recovery and the need for increased resources in our own school, with our own children as indicators.

How Can We Increase Resources?

The logical question raised by the comparison was, "How could more teachers be funded so we could meet the needs of all children?" This is an important question for all elementary schools and is answered in various ways. For example, some have funded teachers by using Title I funds, while others have used state-appropriated funds, EIA or Act 135.

Another plausible example of how to fund additional Reading Recovery teachers is to restructure the first grade class sizes to free up one full-time equivalent teacher position. In the year of this study, there were 141 first grade students in eight classrooms. By reducing the number of classes to seven and placing two or three more children in each of the seven classrooms, the funds used for the eighth classroom teacher could be reallocated to fund two half-time Reading Recovery teachers. These two teachers could share one first grade class, with one teaching Reading Recovery in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The result would be that the three half-time Reading Recovery teachers could serve 24 students, just shy of the 20% goal.

Table 3 illustrates enrollment and service numbers for such an implementation pattern:

Table 3

Enrollment and Service Figures

# of First Graders	# of Students per Class	# of Students Served by Reading Recovery per Class
8	17.6	1
7	20.1	3.4

The increase in class size would be minimal and all first grade teachers would have three or four children served by Reading Recovery, a program with proven success. According to Slavin (1989), reducing class sizes has not resulted in significant effects in increased achievement so this restructuring would likely not have a negative effect.

Full Implementation Is the Goal

Full implementation of Reading Recovery could have a major impact on reduction of reading problems in a school. It would provide early intervention for first grade students rather than remediation after a pattern of failure is established. It would provide needed support for the first grade teachers, thus allowing them to be more effective. According to Dr. Clay, "When the classroom teacher knows that her two or three lowest achievers are working individually with the Reading Recovery teacher she has more time to give to the lower achievers who will not be getting individual help" (Clay, 1993, p.83). In following years reading problems in higher grades could be greatly reduced or eliminated. Clay stated in the South Carolina report, "The outcome of the operation of a fully implemented program over several years should be that the number of children with reading and writing difficulties in grades 2-6 should clearly diminish or even disappear." The Reading Recovery teacher is likely to be more effective as "the understanding of a single teacher trying to work alone can be expanded by discussion with colleagues who bring their pooled understanding to the complex processes being learned by individuals" (Clay, 1991, p.274).

The Guidelines and Standards of the Reading Recovery Council of North America require that sites work towards the goal of full implementation. Educators in the state of South Carolina have reason to be proud. We have the second highest level of implementation in the nation, 10.48%. We are behind only the state of Ohio at 18.86%. But, we cannot stop here. There are too many children not being reached. Consider the numbers of eligible children not served in 1993-94 as illustrated in Table 4:

Table 4

Levels of Implementation and Children Served

	Total #	20%	# RR Served	# Not Served
In the school	141	28	8	20
In the county	4,370	874	256	618
In the state	53,000	10,600	3,140	7,560

We need to continue to work toward the goal of full implementation and not rest until we are able to serve all children who are at risk of reading failure. Literacy for all is a goal that benefits everyone. Illiteracy cost this state and nation dearly. We cannot afford to provide minimal support

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for this undertaking. "Each district, each state and the nation as a whole stand to benefit from a properly researched program. No one gains when a program is jeopardized because personnel and resources are spread too thin" (Dunkeld, 1991, p.52).

The Literacy Challenge, a 1993 publication of the Australian Government's House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training printed what is perhaps the best call for full implementation of Reading Recovery:

> Whether or not Reading Recovery is provided at a school is no longer a matter of resource allocation or a financial decision, it is a moral obligation to provide the most certain entry into the world of reading and literacy and a productive life, which we have been able to locate" (R. W. Reid, Director of Catholic Education, Wagga Wagga Diocese).

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